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Gerret [Gerrit] Willemsz. Heda

active 1640s and 1650s

LITTLE INFORMATION EXISTS concerning the life of Gerret Heda. The earliest document to mention the painter is an entry dated 7 July 1642 in the register of the Saint Luke's Guild of Haarlem. In it, Willem Claesz. Heda affirms that his second son, Gerret, Maerten Boelema (d. after 1664), and Hendrik Heerschop (1620/21–after 1672) are his pupils. Assuming that Gerret entered his father's workshop as a pupil in his early to mid-teens, it is likely that he was born in the 1620s. His death date is not known, but it probably occurred sometime between 1658, when a Gerrit Heda is listed as an active member of the Saint Luke's Guild, and 1661, for he is not named along with his other siblings in a will made by his parents in that year.¹ It is certainly earlier than 1702 when he is listed as dead in a compilation of past members of the guild.

In style and ability Gerret Heda compares closely to his father, and it has at times been difficult to distinguish between the two. Gerret made copies of some of his father's breakfast scenes while he was a

member of the workshop. His independent breakfast pieces, which can approach the quality of his father's compositions, are often signed simply •HEDA•.

Notes

1. A theory that Gerret Heda died in 1649 was advanced by Vroom 1980, 1: 66. His conclusion was based on the rather inconclusive evidence that a tomb was opened in the cathedral of Saint Bavo in Haarlem in 1649 for the burial of a son of Willem Claessen Heda (see correspondence from Dr. Pieter Biesboer, curator, Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem, 10 June 1982 and 28 October 1991, in NGA curatorial files). The name of the son, however, is not mentioned in the document, and there is no assurance that the tomb was meant for Gerret. Another possibility is another son of Heda's, whose name is not known, who may well be the artist who signed paintings "jonge Heda" in the 1640s. Vroom believed that the "jonge Heda" and Gerret Heda were the same person, further confusing the attribution issues in paintings by the Heda family. Information about the identity of the various members of the Heda family will be published in the forthcoming catalogue of paintings of the Frans Halsmuseum. Segal in Delft 1988, 133–136, who lists the different signatures of the Heda family, also rejects Vroom's

theory. For the listing of a Gerret Heda in the register of the Saint Luke's Guild in Haarlem for the year 1658, see Miedema 1980, 2: 1035.

Bibliography

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1985.16.1

Still Life with Ham

1650

Oil on oak, 98.5 x 82.5 (38½ x 32½)

Gift of John S. Thacher

Inscriptions

On the right edge of the tablecloth: ·HEDA· 1650

Technical Notes: The panel consists of three vertically grained oak boards joined vertically. All boards are of similar width, and the outer ones are slightly thicker. Dendrochronology gives a use date of 1646 onward.¹ Bevels appear on all sides of the reverse, which was not smoothly finished. A thin, off-white ground is visible through the brushstrokes of the tablecloth and background, giving a warm tonality, while the wood grain is prominent overall.

Paint was applied thinly and smoothly in multiple layers with great transparency, much glazing, and crisp brushwork in the fuller bodied light passages. Impasted highlights are blended wet into wet. A pentimento of a plate or tablecloth appears beneath the ham, and a short length of fringe was begun and abandoned in the lower left of the tablecloth. Scattered small losses and abrasions have been retouched in at least two distinct restorations, and the shadow below the white cloth has been reinforced. Pale hazy spots have formed in the aged varnish layer. No major conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

Provenance: John S. Thacher, Washington.

THIS IMPRESSIVE STILL LIFE, which is signed and dated “Heda 1650” at the lower right edge of the white tablecloth, came to the National Gallery in 1985 as a work by Willem Claesz. Heda (q.v.). Despite its high quality and the many similarities to paintings by Willem Claesz. Heda, subtle differences in style and concept pointed to the hand of his talented son Gerret Heda. The attribution was subsequently changed, with the realization that Gerret, who emulated his father's style, may well have worked with the elder Heda to produce generic “Heda” paintings for the open market. Complicating such an attribution is the assumption, occasionally found in the literature, that Gerret Heda is identical

with the son of Willem Claesz. Heda who had died in 1649, a year before this painting was executed.² No compelling documentary reason, however, exists for accepting this assumption. Stylistic similarities between signed Gerret Heda paintings from the 1640s and “Heda” still lifes from the 1650s, moreover, are so striking that it must be assumed that Gerret not only remained alive, but was active for at least ten years after this purported death date.³

Among the paintings that can be used as a basis for the attribution of this work to Gerret Heda is a comparable still life by him, signed and dated 1645 (fig. 1). This painting, which is likewise on wood and has similar dimensions (98 x 79 cm), also depicts an upright tabletop still life situated against a plain gray background. In each instance an identical tall fluted glass provides a vertical accent to the display of food, plates, pitchers, glasses, and overturned vessels that are placed either on a dark green, fringed tablecloth or on the white linen that covers it.

Characteristic for Gerret Heda is the relative disarray of the still-life elements, despite the basic pyramidal composition. The white linen is arranged in a haphazard manner so that objects nestle down in its crumpled folds. Even the objects resting on the flat green tablecloth seem slightly askew, in part because Gerret Heda never quite managed to achieve the same mastery of perspective found in paintings by his father (see, for example, *Banquet Piece with Mince Pie*, 1991.87.1). Adding to this effect is the distinctive way in which Gerret Heda has bunched the white linen cloth to activate the surface with an array of shimmering folds. By creating this effect he sacrificed the stabilizing function that the horizontal and vertical shapes of similar linens perform in his father's paintings. Further comparison with paintings by Willem Claesz. Heda also confirms that, as talented as he was, Gerret did not achieve his father's sensitivity of touch: his paint is somewhat denser, reflections are not as nuanced, and distinctions between materials are not as finely wrought.

The objects on the table do not represent a specific meal, as is quite clear when one compares this work to other examples where like elements are found in similar arrangements (figs. 1 and 2).⁴ Whereas the same fluted glass and pewter pitcher are found in the Frans Halsmuseum painting, the identical mustard pot and a similar ham appear in the Pushkin Museum still life.⁵ In all three of these still lifes Heda has displayed a sumptuous feast, each of which calls to mind the richness and bounty that the Dutch had come to enjoy around mid-century. In each instance Heda has indicated a human presence in the way that the food and drink have been partially con-